

Wisconsin

Department of Natural Resources

NEWS

SPECIAL EDITION

2004 Fall Hunting Forecasts

August 30, 2004

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Edited by Paul Holtan

Wisconsin DNR

PO Box 7921

Madison WI 53707-7921

(608) 267-7517

fax: (608) 264-6293

e-mail: holtap@dnr.state.wi.us

World Wide Web:

<http://dnr.wi.gov>

Dear Wisconsin Hunter,

By Scott Hassett, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

I hesitate to say things are settling down in the world of deer hunting, but compared to the previous two seasons, 2004 at least has some signs of a more normal hunt. It's true that we have a large herd and many management units with either Zone T or Earn-a-Buck rules in place for this fall, but compared to the wild ride we've had in '02 and '03 with CWD it seems well, almost quiet.

With September just around the corner, I'm guessing that, like me, you are thinking more and more about cool weather, fall colors, Packers and fall season openers. Fall is a special time of year for me as a hunter, angler and father. It's a time to build on friendships, strengthen family bonds and create memories. This summer I was able to spend some time at the Great Outdoor Games and it really energized me.

In January, Governor Doyle proclaimed 2004 the Year of Wisconsin Forestry honoring 100 years of professional forest management in Wisconsin. In reflecting on the many great memories and opportunities the Wisconsin outdoors has given me over the years, I hope that all outdoor sportsmen and women will take a moment this fall to reflect on the tremendous resource we have in our forests and on the responsibility we have to wisely manage this resource for future generations.

Thanks for your help, your ideas, and your commitment to conservation for now and for the future. Have a great season.



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2004 deer season forecast

Deer hunters in 2003 set archery and muzzleloader harvest records as well as the third highest total deer harvest in Wisconsin history. Two thousand and four has the potential to be another excellent deer season. Estimated at approximately 1.7 million animals, the state's deer herd is well above population goals. However, if hunters continue their trend of strong population control efforts, we can move back toward goal in many units. To help accomplish this reduction, there will be herd reduction hunts in 74 Deer Management Units (DMUs).

Zone T in 2004

Forty-eight DMUs are designated as Zone T units in 2004. Zone T units are DMUs where it is projected that the traditional deer season framework would not reduce the deer population to within 20 percent of that unit's over-winter population goal. To increase the antlerless harvest and reduce the deer population in these units, 4-day antlerless only gun hunts are implemented in October and/or December.

DMUs north of Hwy. 8 are not included in the December Zone T season. Hunters should check the 2004 DMU map to see which units are designated for Zone T in 2004. If Zone T seasons are not effective after two years, earn-a-buck seasons may be implemented. Hunters are encouraged to help reduce the deer population in Zone T units by harvesting antlerless deer.

Earn-a-Buck in 2004

For the first time since 1996, Earn-a-Buck regulations have been implemented in 26 deer management units outside the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) management zones. In order for a unit to be designated as Earn-a-Buck, the unit must first have two consecutive years of Zone T. If a third consecutive year of Zone T is warranted, but is not expected to reduce the deer population to within 20 percent of goal, the unit can be designated as Earn-a-Buck. Earn-a-buck regulations require a hunter to first tag an antlerless deer before they can tag an antlered buck. Earn-a-Buck and Zone T regulations will be lifted in future years if enough antlerless deer are harvested to bring (and maintain) the over-winter population to within 20 percent of goal.

In addition to Zone T and Earn-a-Buck, many DMUs will have bonus antlerless permits available for hunters who wish to harvest additional antlerless deer. Bonus antlerless deer permits (\$12 resident, \$20 non-resident) went on sale over the counter at all license agents on Aug. 21.

Chronic Wasting Disease Deer management units

Deer management units, including state park units, located in the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Eradication Zone and the Herd Reduction Zone will again have special regulations for the 2004 season. These Zones include DMU's 54B CWD, 70 CWD, 70A CWD, 70B CWD, 70C, 70D, 70E CWD, 70F, 70G CWD, 71 CWD, 73B CWD, 73E CWD, 75A CWD, 75B, 75C CWD, 75D CWD, 76 CWD, 76A CWD, 76M CWD, and 77A CWD, 77B, CWD, and 77C CWD.

These units will have extended gun and archery seasons and also have an unlimited Earn-a-Buck season structure. The unlimited Earn-a-Buck structure requires a hunter to harvest an antlerless deer before they are legally eligible to harvest an antlered buck. In the CWD units hunters will again be eligible to harvest a buck for each antlerless deer they shoot.

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Hunters planning on hunting one of the CWD Zones should review the 2004 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet, available on line at www.dnr.gov and at license vendors and DNR Service Centers, for specific details on hunting dates, rules and zone boundaries.

Youth deer hunt

The second annual Youth Deer Hunt will be Oct. 30, 2004. This special one-day hunt was established to provide more youth deer hunting opportunity. The hunt will be held in any regular deer management unit (except state park and other non-quota units). Any licensed hunter can already hunt in a Zone T, Earn-a-Buck, or CWD unit on this day. Youth hunters age 12 – 15 that have successfully completed a hunter education program may participate in the hunt. Qualified hunters may harvest one antlerless deer per hunter's choice or bonus permit in the unit that the permit was issued for. For more information on the youth hunt, check the 2004 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet at www.dnr.gov.

State Parks and CWD metro units

Deer hunting in State Park units 23A, 52A, 57D, 61A, 69C, 72A, 73A, 77D, and 80C is again by limited draw. Hunters wishing to hunt in these State Park units had to apply for access using the 2004 Hunter's Choice Application by July 20 (a \$3 application required, except for conservation patron license holders). Special season dates, hours, and area restrictions may apply within the parks; this information will be mailed to successful applicants.

Metro units 1M, 59M, 60M, 64M, and 77M are designated as Zone T units in 2004. These metro units also have special deer hunting season dates. Hunters should consult the 2004 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet for season dates in these units. Check local ordinances on firearm and bow use before hunting because many areas within the borders of the Metro Units do not allow firearm discharge and some may not allow the discharge of bow and arrow, or crossbow.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Brad Koele at (608)-261-7589

Season Dates

Archery:

Sept. 18 – Nov. 18
Nov. 29 – Jan. 3

Note: Archery Harvest in all Zone T and Earn-a-Buck units is restricted to antlerless deer from Oct. 28 – 31. Archery harvest in Zone T and Earn-a-Buck units south of Hwy. 8 is also restricted to antlerless deer from Dec. 9 - 12. Zone T and Earn-a-Buck units north of Hwy. 8 will not participate in the December firearm hunt.

Gun:

Early Zone T: Oct. 28 – 31 (antlerless only for archery and firearm)
Regular gun: Nov. 20 – 28
Late Zone T: Dec. 9 - 12 (antlerless only for archery and firearm)
Muzzleloader: Nov. 29 – Dec. 8

Youth Hunt:

Oct. 30

Disabled Hunt:

Oct. 2 – 10

Chronic Wasting Disease Zones:

Gun: Oct. 28 – Jan. 3, 2005
Archery: Sept. 18 – Jan. 3, 2005 (archers must wear blaze orange Oct. 28 – Jan. 3)

Herd Reduction Zone:

Gun: Oct. 28 – 31 and Nov. 20 – Jan. 3
Archery: Sept. 18 – Jan. 3 (archers must wear blaze orange Oct. 28 – 31 and Nov. 20 - Jan. 3)

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Regional Forecasts

South Central Region

By Carl Batha, Regional Wildlife Supervisor (608) 935-1922

Most South Central region deer management units are again the focal point of the department's efforts to eradicate chronic wasting disease (CWD).

Deer management unit 73D is the only unit in the region that will have the traditional 9-day deer season. Unit 68B, the northern ½ of Unit 76A, and a portion of 73B will be in Zone T this year and will have additional hunting opportunities during the October and December Zone T seasons. The balance of the region will experience greatly expanded hunting opportunities as we continue our efforts to control CWD.

Hunters should pay close attention to the season structure and boundaries in the Disease Eradication Zone (DEZ) and the Herd Reduction Zone (HRZ). The DEZ was expanded again this year to encompass a few new CWD positive animals found during the hunting seasons last fall. The Rock County DEZ was also expanded to encompass two positive animals shot outside the boundaries of last year's DEZ. All of 70G is now included in the HRZ and the southern portion of Unit 76A was added to the HRZ this year as well. The season structure and regulations in both Zones are similar to what we've had the past two years, with hunters being required to Earn-a-Buck by shooting an antlerless deer first. Deer harvested from the DEZ must be tested for CWD. Fawns from the DEZ will not be tested except upon hunter request.

We have dropped the use of the Intensive Harvest Zone in favor of designating the DEZ by road boundaries. We hope this will simplify the confusion created by these two zones over the past two years. This spring we revised the deer population goal in the DEZ from zero deer per square mile to less than five deer per square mile. Many people questioned whether we could actually get down to zero or whether getting to zero was necessary for disease eradication. Scientists believe that the deer population must be brought to a very low number to control CWD but that something higher than zero might do the job.

Landowners will again be able to get landowner permits that will allow them to hunt, and others to hunt, on land they own in the Disease Eradication Zone without having to buy a hunting license. Permits will be issued by hunting license vendors using the Automated License Issuing System (ALIS) for a \$2 processing fee. These permits will be available starting September 1. Hunters wishing to hunt under the authority of a landowner permit must first pick up a DEZ hunter permit and landowner permit authorization form at a hunting license sales location. These permits will also be available beginning September 1, 2004 for a \$2 processing fee.

Rewards Program

In 2003, Whitetails Unlimited (WTU) partnered with the DNR to implement a pilot CWD Reward Program during the 2003-04 hunting season. The joint program was designed to reward hunters and landowners who participated in harvesting deer to control CWD in the area of known infection.

We expect a similar two-part program will be in place for the 2004-05 hunting seasons. The reward program is expected to have at least \$200,000 available for payouts in 2004.

- Focus on Positives will pay out \$400 for each CWD-positive deer shot anywhere in the state. The \$400 will be split with \$200 going to the landowner on whose property the deer was shot, and the other \$200 going to the hunter who harvested the CWD-positive deer. If the hunter is the landowner they collect the entire \$400.
- Every Deer Helps makes hunters eligible through a random drawing for a \$20 payment for each deer they register in the DEZ. It's possible for hunters registering multiple deer to win more than one \$20 reward.

This continues to be an extremely challenging time for everyone involved in trying to stop CWD in Wisconsin. A strong partnership between landowners and hunters remains critical to our goal of stopping CWD in its tracks. We still believe we have our best chance of eradicating the disease by taking aggressive action now, while the disease is limited to this portion of the state.

We also realize we don't have all the answers yet and that we must be willing to learn more as new scientific information becomes available and adapt our disease eradication strategies to reflect that new knowledge. But we remain committed to the goal of herd reduction and disease eradication. We do believe we can be successful, but our success absolutely depends on landowners and hunters working together to kill deer in large numbers in this region again this fall.

Northeast Region

By Tom Bahti, Regional Wildlife Supervisor (920) 492-5827

Deer hunters will see dramatic differences in herd status and deer hunting opportunities as they travel North to South across the Northeast Region this fall.

In deer management units (DMU) in northern Oconto and Marinette counties (41, 44, 45, 49A&B and 50) which as a rule have lots of public land and heavy hunting pressure, deer populations remain at or near prescribed goals. These units will see a conventional "buck plus quota" hunting season framework this fall. Some DMUs, such as 45 and 49A, will have relatively small antlerless quotas. In other DMUs, like 44 and 50, aggressive antlerless harvests will be necessary to keep the units out of Zone T seasons, so plenty of bonus antlerless deer permits will be available.

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In the remaining southern two-thirds of the region, it's a different story. The remaining 18 DMUs in the Northeast region are in Zone T season framework, with 15 of these units having the additional "Earn-A-Buck" requirement for the fall of 2004. Numerous years of general Zone T seasons have been unsuccessful in reducing deer populations in these units, and now, for the first time since 1996, earn-a-buck will be utilized to bring down deer numbers. An antlerless deer must be killed before an antlered buck may be taken in these specified DMUs.

A fact sheet on earn-a-buck is available on the DNR Web site, www.dnr.gov. Opportunities for hunting deer in this part of the region have probably never been better, and hunters should see an outstanding season, with dramatically higher antlerless harvests and a substantial carryover of bucks into the 2005 hunt.

Have a safe and productive fall hunting season, and do your part to become a deer "manager"!

Northern Region

By Mike Zeckmeister, regional wildlife biologist (715) 623-4190

Overall, last year's winter was considered "average" with most stations recording a "moderate winter" while some reporting a "severe winter". The spring green-up date throughout northern Wisconsin was about average with above normal precipitation going into the early summer. The end-result is that deer are in extraordinary good condition again this year.

Our 2004 deer season structure for northern Wisconsin is probably the most aggressive deer season in recent history. This calls for eight units to be in Earn-A-Buck and 21 units in Zone T.

There are 16 additional units where we have good reason to believe that we can manage the deer herd with a traditional season and aggressive antlerless quotas. There were several units where a second year of Zone T resulted in an excellent antlerless harvest in 2003 and as a result the units were not recommended for EAB or Zone T.

Southeast Region

By Jim McNelly, regional wildlife supervisor (414) 263-8710

Deer populations are highly variable in this part of the state due to the variety of habitat conditions and hunting pressure. Hunting pressure is very high on all public lands and many private landowners restrict hunting access to friends and relatives. Those hunters wishing to hunt on lands in this region are encouraged to get out and meet landowners to get permission to hunt and scout well before the season. Hunters should always check with local townships and village offices to see if there are any prohibitions on the firearm or archery equipment safety ordinances.

All of Deer Management Unit 77B and the southern portion of DMU 77C will fall within CWD management zones. Southwestern Walworth County falls within a Disease Eradication Zone and much of the remainder of 77B and 77C fall into a Herd Reduction Zone. These designations indicate that hunters can harvest multiple deer using an unlimited Earn-a-Buck format. For each antlerless deer harvested in the designated areas by a hunter, an additional buck can be harvested.

We are depending on hunters to help us eliminate Chronic Wasting Disease in southwestern Walworth County and to help reduce deer populations in the remainder of the Herd Reduction Zone to stop the spread of this disease. Hunters should carefully review the new regulations for this area and note that deer taken from these zones must be registered within 24 hours of harvest and registered at stations within the zone.

The anticipated deer harvest within the southeast region will likely be slightly higher than the past year due to a relatively mild winter, a modest increases in bonus permits and the opportunity to shoot multiple deer in the Disease Eradication Zone and the Herd Reduction Zone. Bonus permits available for fall 2004 generally exceed the numbers of bonus permit applicants for 2003, so bonus permits should be available for anyone who hunts in these areas.

Hunters who hunt in the Disease Eradication Zone will be required to have their adult deer tested for Chronic Wasting Disease at the time it is registered. Fawns will not be tested except by hunter request. Deer from the HRZ will only be tested upon hunter request. Department Wildlife Staff and DNR contractors will work with those hunters who wish to have their deer head mounted. These CWD samples are needed from several counties within this region to better define the extent of the disease and strategies to combat it. Sampling will be conducted free of charge and the test results provided to the hunter by the DNR.

Individuals hunting in Walworth County should pay particular attention to the 2004 Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet, as some of the county will be managed as part of the CWD Herd Reduction Zone. Please consult the 2004 regulation pamphlet for zone boundaries.

West Central Region

By Robert Michelson, regional wildlife biologist (715) 839-3736

Deer numbers are high throughout the west central part of Wisconsin. Only five units in the West Central Region will not be Zone T or Earn a Buck (EAB) for 2004. In total, the region will have 19 Zone T units (eight in 2003), four EAB units and five quota units. Adequate CWD testing has now been completed in all counties to provide a high level of assurance that the disease is not present in the wild herd in WCR. For 2004 CWD testing will only occur in Portage County to confirm that CWD is confined to a captive herd in that county.

With less concern with CWD, hunting pressure returned to a closer to normal level last year and that trend is expected to continue. There will be ample opportunity to harvest deer in WCR in 2004 and we are hoping that greater numbers of hunters take advantage of the liberal season and bring populations to a level that will reduce the need for Zone T and EAB seasons. EAB is not a popular hunting framework, but it is the most effective way to get the antlerless harvests necessary to bring deer populations to acceptable levels.

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Chronic Wasting Disease update

By Tom Hauge, director of the DNR Bureau of Wildlife Management

Wisconsin is entering its third year of CWD management with a ton of accomplishments behind us. We've sampled more than 56,000 deer in the past three years and made real progress in reducing deer populations in the CWD "core area." We've simplified things by combining some of the confusing zone designations into just two: the Herd Reduction Zone (HRZ) with a population goal of less than 15 deer per square mile of deer range; and the Disease Eradication Zone (DEZ) with a population goal of less than five deer per square mile.

In 2003 Wisconsin deer hunters set archery and muzzleloader harvest records and recorded the third highest total deer harvest in Wisconsin history. I think by most any measuring stick, this was a pretty successful season and especially as it came on the heels of the state's first year of dealing with Chronic Wasting Disease.

This year, landowners in the DEZ and hunters they designate will again be able to hunt the DEZ without buying a regular deer hunting license by requesting a DEZ landowner's permit. These permits are now available from any license vendor.

The 56,000 deer tested for chronic wasting disease at Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, likely the largest wildlife disease surveillance effort of all time, detected 326 CWD-positive deer. This enormous accomplishment would not have been possible without the cooperation of hunters who surrendered the heads of their deer at collection stations during regular and extended fall gun deer seasons and in special summer hunts.

CWD has not been detected in the wild in any other area of the state. Details of the testing effort, down to results for individual deer management units and counties, can be searched on the DNR Web site, <<http://dnr.wi.gov>>.

This fall, there will be two CWD zones. The Disease Eradication Zone (DEZ) and a surrounding Herd Reduction Zone. Archery deer hunting begins in both zones on Sept. 18 through Jan. 3. Gun deer hunting in the HRZ is Oct. 28-31 and Nov. 20 – Jan. 3. Gun hunting in the DEZ starts on Oct. 28 and runs non-stop through Jan. 3. Both zones have Earn-a-Buck rules in place and there are no bag limits in either zone. For every antlerless deer a hunter shoots they'll get another buck tag.

Permits and buck tags

Landowners within the disease eradication zone can apply for a landowner harvest permit and hunt on their property without buying a hunting license.

For the first time, landowner permits can be picked up from any license vendor for a \$2 processing fee. Hunters with landowner permission can also hunt without buying a regular gun deer

license using a CWD hunter's permit – also available through license vendors. Landowners can invite friends, relatives or other acquaintances to hunt their lands. The only requirement is that the permit holder and anyone they invite to help must meet the legal, age and hunter safety requirements for obtaining a hunting license in Wisconsin.

Landowners will receive one buck tag with a landowner's permit. The buck tags can be used during any open deer season in the DEZ and can be filled before first harvesting an antlerless deer. The tags are not transferable to any other hunter.

Again this year, small game and general hunting regulations are being published separately from deer hunting regulations. The deer regulations pamphlet, detailing seasons, rules, bags, and zones for CWD and non-CWD deer management units is available on the DNR Web site <<http://dnr.wi.gov>> or in printed form at DNR Service Centers, license vendors and other locations.

Testing in 2004

The Department of Natural Resources will be collecting samples from adult deer killed in the DEZ. Fawns will not be tested except upon hunter request. Additionally, samples will be collected from adult deer killed in the HRZ in an approximate 10-mile buffer ring around the DEZ during the Oct. 28-31 portion of the gun deer hunt and again on the opening weekend of the regular gun deer season Nov. 20-28.

Baiting and Feeding

Baiting and feeding of deer is currently banned by emergency rule in 26 southern Wisconsin Counties and restricted to 2 gallons in all other areas; scents are allowed with some restrictions. Details on baiting and feeding in unaffected counties are available on the DNR Web site <<http://dnr.wi.gov>> and in the 2004 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations.

The public will have an opportunity to comment on permanent baiting and feeding rules at hearings planned for late September with locations to be announced at a future date.

The ban includes the following counties: Adams, Calumet, Columbia, Crawford, Dane, Dodge, Grant, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Juneau, Kenosha, Lafayette, Manitowoc, Marquette, Milwaukee, Portage, Racine, Richland, Rock, Sauk, Sheboygan, Vernon, Walworth, Waukesha and Waushara.

Venison Donation

Hunters in the Disease Eradication Zone will have up to five participating meat processors where they can drop off deer that they cannot personally use. The meat processors will store the venison until CWD test results are returned then process all non-positive deer for distribution to food pantries.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tom Hauge - (608) 266-2193

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2004 Waterfowl Hunting Season Forecast

By Kent Van Horn, DNR migratory waterfowl ecologist - (608) 266-8841

MADISON – Based on breeding waterfowl numbers, hunters can expect about the average number of ducks this fall. However, the number of ducks an individual hunter sees is largely dependent upon local conditions such as weather and water levels. Preseason scouting is necessary to know your local conditions and increases the quality of the hunting experience.

The fall population of ducks in Wisconsin is dependent upon spring breeding conditions in Wisconsin, the surrounding Great Lakes area and the prairies of the US and Canada. However, many of the ducks harvested in Wisconsin are local birds. The most abundant duck in our fall harvest is the mallard and about 70 percent of the mallards we harvest in Wisconsin were raised in Wisconsin or the Great Lakes.

During early May, when Wisconsin's breeding waterfowl survey was conducted, conditions were dry. This situation changed and during late May and early June above average rains created good brood habitat across the state. In some areas, rainfall was heavy and may have flooded some nests. The total Wisconsin breeding duck population estimate was 651,000, which is up 22 percent from 2003 and 58 percent above the long-term average based on 2004's revised analysis. Mallard and wood duck numbers were statistically similar to 2003 but above their long-term averages.

While the prairies do not provide much of Wisconsin's harvest, the conditions in the prairies determine the season framework that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) applies to Wisconsin and the other Mississippi Flyway states. Conditions were also dry during the May surveys in the prairies but some areas received good rainfall following the surveys and into the summer. While many ducks did not nest because of initial dry conditions in the prairies, those that did nest experienced good brood conditions in important areas of the prairies. Mallard numbers from the USFWS surveys in the prairies were similar to 2003 and to the long-term average for mallards. Because mallard numbers were average the USFWS's Adaptive Harvest Management system recommended a 60-day season.

Across most of the state early summer rains filled many basins so conditions at this time are about normal and rainfall predictions for the next three months appear to be about normal as well. Depending on local conditions, hunters can expect conditions similar to recent years.

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Canada geese

There are two different populations of Canada geese that are present in Wisconsin during the regular fall hunting season. One population, called giant Canada geese, nests in Wisconsin. The second population of interior Canada geese is a slightly smaller bird. This population nests in northern Ontario along the coast of Hudson Bay, migrates through Wisconsin and other Midwestern states, and is called the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP). Results from the most current banding data indicate that 61 percent of Wisconsin's regular goose season harvest comes from the MVP.

Breeding conditions for the MVP Canada geese in Ontario were poor this year with a late winter having a negative impact on breeding pairs and the numbers of eggs laid per pair. Because of this poor production in the MVP Canada geese, Wisconsin's statewide goose harvest quota was significantly reduced from 85,500 in 2003 to 49,200 in 2004.

Resident breeding Canada geese numbers seem consistent with the long term increasing trend and these birds continue to buffer the impact of reduced production years in Ontario. This fall, hunters should expect to see fewer Canada geese overall and have reduced hunting opportunities. The Horicon and Collins Zone hunters will be issued three tags in contrast to the six tags offered in 2003. The Exterior zone will open on Sept. 18 in order to take advantage of the higher proportion of resident Canada geese in the population at this time.

Hunters need to remember to report all geese harvested by calling 1-800-99-GOOSE (1-800-994-6673). They should also anticipate that the Exterior zone may close early if we reach our harvest quota. Hunters should monitor the total harvest status by calling 1-877-833-2837.

One advantage hunters have in Wisconsin is to hunt the early September Canada goose season (Sept. 1-3, 7-15) which allows hunters to harvest giant Canada geese before the MVP migrants arrive in our state. For 2004, the early September season will offer a five-bird-per-day limit for the entire state, excluding the closed Burnett County subzone. Geese harvested during this early season are not included in the regular season harvest quota.

Wisconsin will again be offering a youth waterfowl hunt on Sept. 18-19, offering hunters an opportunity to introduce a young person to the waterfowl hunting experience.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kent Van Horn - (608) 266-8841

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2004 Wisconsin black bear hunting season forecast

By Kyle LaFond, assistant DNR bear ecologist - (608) 261-7588

MADISON – State wildlife officials estimate the black bear population in Wisconsin going into the fall hunting season is approximately 12,700 animals.

Working with hunters and conservationists, we have done a good job of managing the bear population at ecologically and socially acceptable levels, primarily through hunting efforts. Wisconsin can be proud to boast a healthy and stable black bear population.

This year the department issued 4,740 Class A bear permits and set a harvest goal of 2,500 animals. Interest in bear hunting has risen steadily over the years, and 2004 marks the first occasion where over 60,000 hunters applied for and received either a harvest permit or a preference point.

Last year, hunters harvested 2,905 bears with the highest harvests occurring in Bayfield, Price, and Douglas counties. Bear Management Zone (BMZ) A1 led the state with a harvest of 1,075 bears followed by zones A (983), B (476), and C (371).

Bear hunters need to be aware of new baiting restrictions that are now in place. Bait materials must be totally enclosed in a hollow log, a hole in the ground, or stump that is capped with logs, rocks, or other naturally occurring and unprocessed substances that prevent deer from accessing the material.

More information on these new restrictions is available in the bear baiting supplement available at DNR offices or on the DNR Web site.

Bear forecasts by DNR Region

Northern Region

Some outstanding black bear hunting opportunities should be available to hunters in 2004. Northern Wisconsin consists of three bear hunting management zones: A1, A, B. Hunting success rates last year were 54, 63, and 77 percent respectively for these three zones. This is an outstanding success rate and is a reflection of the bear population level. The number of permits available in Zone B has increased due to especially high bear numbers in this zone. The wet spring has resulted in some very lush vegetation with ample food supplies.

Northeast Region

A healthy bear population in the Zone B portion of the northeast region should provide hunters with plenty of opportunity during the 2004 harvest season. Bait station surveys and bear nuisance complaints are close to those indices from 2003. Frequent rain in spring and early summer set the stage for a good soft mast crop. This abundant food source may affect visitation at bait sites in the early part of the season. Callers to DNR stations have reported some sows with up to four cubs.

In Zone C, the bear population continues to thrive and expand. Public land hunting opportunities are more limited in this portion of the region so hunters with a Zone C tag should consider contacting private landowners early to establish a place to hunt. Hounds are not allowed during the harvest season in this zone. As with Zone B, soft mast may affect visitation to bait sites so hunters may want to establish multiple hunting areas.

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West Central Region

Except for the extreme northeast corner of Chippewa County, all 19 counties of the West Central Region are located in Bear Management Zone C. This means that even though bear dogs can be trained in this zone, hunters are not allowed to use dogs to hunt bear. Zone C has the longest concurrent season of all four zones, starting Sept. 8 and running through Oct. 12.

Last year's Zone C harvest was 371 animals. This number exceeded the harvest quota established by the WDNR Bear Committee. This was a result of good hunting conditions with many bait sites getting multiple bear using them. Even though the quota was exceeded, all indications are that the population is healthy and growing.

This fall's harvest goal is 500 bear, up from 300 last year. This increase has resulted in permit levels increasing from 780 in 2003, to 1,250 this year. This should result in another excellent bear season in the West Central Region.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kyle LaFond - (608) 261-7588

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2004 fall furbearer forecast

By John Olson, DNR furbearer specialist

Wisconsin is blessed with a wonderful diversity of both common and unique members of this interesting group of fur-bearing wildlife. Beaver, coyote, raccoon, and muskrat are good examples of the more abundant and common species across our large state.

In contrast, the more secretive bobcat, fisher and otter are doing well in the north and slowly expanding southward. And then there's the marten, still an endangered species and barely holding its own in two small regions of the north.

But in a nutshell, most of Wisconsin's furbearer populations are doing well, and in some areas present a challenge due to large populations. Last year's mild winter did improve harvest success, but did not impact overall populations.

Raccoon

Raccoons are found in a wide variety of both rural and urban habitats. Those areas close to a wetland or farmland mosaic have some of the highest populations, with the expansive northern forests being on the lower end of the spectrum.

Wisconsin has large populations of raccoons with the highest densities in the southern one-half of the state. Raccoon are still very abundant in all counties in a wide variety of habitats – often to nuisance levels.

Dave Matheys, wildlife biologist for Vernon County in southwestern Wisconsin, reports that “raccoons are prevalent across the landscape, with most landowners, especially farmers, willing to allow trappers on their land to reduce their numbers.”

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Kerry Beheler, wildlife health specialist from Madison notes, however, “that high populations of raccoons can produce localized pockets of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) infection. In the past few years there were widespread problems with Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) causing raccoon deaths.”

“DV acts as a population regulating factor that controls high raccoon numbers and once CDV is in the environment, it can spread to other mammals, according to Beheler.

“CDV infections were found in less commonly affected furbearers including badger, opossum, and mink in recent years. Everyone should take special care with abnormal-acting raccoons, as CDV clinical signs mimic those of rabies virus. Rabies is a fatal viral disease for humans and other warm-blooded mammals, and cannot be differentiated from CDV without laboratory testing.”

Wildlife managers suggest that this will be a good year to train young dogs or ask permission to trap on new lands. Raccoon is a species where landowner permission to hunt or trap is normally not a problem, but trappers should give themselves ample time to contact landowners and learn from them where best to focus their attention.

Chuck McCullough, wildlife supervisor from Rhinelander urges trappers and hunters to, “get permission from the landowner well in advance. Now is not too early to start asking permission.”

The raccoon season opens statewide for residents on Oct. 16, with the exception of the Mississippi River Zone where that season opens with the muskrat and mink season.

Season: Oct. 16 – Jan. 31, 2005. Except: Mississippi River zone, which opens day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November which ever occurs first through Jan. 31, 2005.

Bag Limit: None

Beaver

With decent fur prices at the international auctions, interest in this furbearer remains relatively stable and is expected to remain good through the 2004-2005 season. Longer seasons, initiated in the 1980s, have helped to reduce beaver populations as planned. However, lower fur prices in the future could reverse this trend.

Statewide, the beaver population estimate is around 80,000 animals and doing well. Since 1996 beaver populations have not shown any signs of ill health from density-dependent wetland diseases such as botulism or tularemia.

Regionally, beaver numbers in southern Wisconsin appear to be stable to increasing while intensive aerial surveys, conducted every three years in northern beaver management zones, indicate a stable population of approximately 40,000 beaver in northwestern Wisconsin, known as Zone A. Nancy Christel, wildlife manager in Spooner indicates, “beaver complaints have been very low for the past few years.”

In northeastern Wisconsin (Zone B), where more intensive management programs exist, the population has declined to around 21,000 beavers.

Along the Mississippi River, Pat Beringer, wildlife biologist in La Crosse reports that, “...the rather unique Mississippi River beaver management zone has experienced a decline in beaver numbers.”

Season: Zone A (Northwest) Oct. 23 – Apr 30, 2005

Bag limit: None

Zone B (Northeast) Oct. 23 – Apr 30, 2005

Zone C (South) Nov. 6 – Apr 30, 2005

Zone D (Mississippi River) Day after duck season closes to Mar 15, 2005

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Otter

“Factors that impact beaver populations have similar affects on otter,” according to Jolene Kuehn, assistant DNR furbearer specialist. “Beaver are herbivores that prefer the inner bark of aspen, willow and cottonwood for food, and their branches for construction of dams and lodges. The otter prefers other animals for food, mainly small fish, crayfish, and amphibians.”

Current statewide otter populations are at or slightly below management goals of approximately 13,000 animals. Although a majority of the population is found in the north, otter numbers in central and southern Wisconsin appear to be increasing. They are now present in many of our major river systems of the southwest, namely the Kickapoo, Black, Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers and tributaries.

Otter, like many of our other furbearers, are associated with and depend on clean rivers, lakes and streams.

“The otter season is highly regulated, and provide one of the latest opportunities to harvest wildlife in Wisconsin,” says Kuehn. “The statewide opening date is December 4, and continues until March 6, 2005 in the Central and South Zones, and April 30th in the North Zone.”

“Permit levels will decrease slightly this year due mainly to increased success rates and careful population management,” says Kuehn. “However, a person can expect to receive at least one permit and possibly additional permit(s) depending upon the number of applicants in your zone of choice.”

Season: North zone Dec. 4 – Apr 30, 2005
Central zone Dec. 4 – March 7, 2005
South zone Dec. 4 – March 7, 2005

Application Deadline for Permit: Sept. 10
Bag Limit: One per permit.

Fisher

Strong interest in fisher by tribal and state trappers has resulted in more applicants than permits, especially in fisher management Zone A in northwestern Wisconsin. Permit numbers are up slightly this year, but the number of permit applications received for each zone will determine whether a trapper receives a permit in their zone of choice or is awarded a preference point. In all areas, fisher health is exceptional with no known pathogens threatening them.

There are six fisher management zones in Wisconsin. Zones A through D have the highest fisher populations and are located in the northern portion of the state. Zone E is in west central Wisconsin and has a growing population. In Zone E, the best opportunities will be in the northern portions, namely Chippewa, Clark, Eau Claire and Marathon counties, according to John Dunn, wildlife biologist at Eau Claire. Zone F includes the remainder of the state and will be open for harvest in 2004 for the first time. In this zone good opportunities exist on the eastern portion, in southern Shawano and Oconto counties and southeastern Marathon. Be sure you have landowner permission prior to applying for any permits.

Season: November 1 – Dec. 31 for all zones
Application Deadline for Permit: Sept. 10
Bag Limit: One per permit

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Bobcat

Even though Wisconsin is on the northern edge of bobcat range, bobcat populations are slowly increasing across the northern forest. The state has relatively good bobcat habitat and the recent run of mild northern Wisconsin winters also favor this species. Conservative management efforts have allowed for a steady increase to an estimated population of approximately 3,000 animals with an average annual harvest of around 220 to 250 animals.

Final permit numbers are determined in late summer when success rates and quotas are calculated. A preference system allows the continuous applicant a bobcat tag about every four to five years.

Wildlife biologists in northern and even central portions of the state report an increase in bobcat sightings.

As with fisher and otter, bobcat must be tagged at the point of harvest and registered with a conservation warden. Hunters and trappers keep the pelt but bobcat carcasses, and in some years otter and fisher, are collected from the trapper or hunter.

“Registration and carcass collections allow biologists to gather important species management information such as harvest pressure, overall age structure of the population, reproductive age, and previous litter sizes,” explains Amber Roth, a DNR researcher in Rhinelander.

In 2004, carcasses will be required from all bobcat and fisher from Zones E and F, and fisher skulls from Zones A through D.

Season: Oct. 16 – Dec. 31 North of highway 64 only

Application Deadline for Permit: Sept. 10

Bag Limit: One per permit

Coyotes and Foxes

Coyotes, the second largest of Wisconsin’s native canids, have expanded their range throughout southern and western Wisconsin. In the remainder of the state they continue to do well except in established eastern gray wolf territories where the wolf pushes its smaller cousin out of the neighborhood. An adaptable animal, coyotes seem to fair well in rural, urban and suburban settings.

“Foxes, our third native canid, prefer a more rural setting,” says Tami Ryan DNR wildlife supervisor from Waukesha, who also reports that, “coyote numbers are stable and steadily increasing in the southeast portion of the state.”

Red fox numbers have increased across many areas of the north, with mange and coyote competition impacting populations in western and southern portions of the state. A density dependent disease, sarcoptic mange, was observed across Wisconsin in susceptible canid species including red fox, coyote, and gray wolf in 2003. Gray fox have fewer cases of mange and appear to be doing well in southern and central Wisconsin.

“In past years, the eastern gray wolf has been on both state and federal endangered/threatened species lists,” said Adrian Wydeven, mammalian ecologist from Park Falls. “In 2003, the US Fish and Wildlife Service downlisted the eastern gray wolf in Wisconsin from endangered to threatened status and has started its process to remove it from the threatened species list.

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Wisconsin delisted gray wolves to protected wild animal status. Formal delisting may take a couple of years, but will be a major step in management of this species in the western Great Lakes region.”

Currently, only designated government trappers, state biologists, or conservation law enforcement officers have authority to trap and dispatch wolves when deemed necessary.

The gradual increase in numbers and expansion of the gray wolf across northern and west-central portions of the state offer a unique opportunity for hunters and trappers to observe these wild and wonderful canines.

“We encourage the public to report their observations,” says Wydeven, “especially hunters and trappers who are intimately familiar with their area of the state. This kind of information is valuable to our efforts in monitoring populations. Every observation counts and we welcome the help.”

Seasons:

Trapping coyote and all fox species:
Oct. 16 – Feb. 15 (Northern Zone, north of US Highway 64)
Trapping coyote and all fox species
Oct. 30 – Feb. 15 (Southern Zone, south of Highway 64)

Hunting of coyote
Year round with seasonal closure during gun deer season in some areas
Hunting of Fox
Oct. 16- Feb. 15 (North of Highway 64)
Oct. 30 – Feb. 15 (South of Highway 64)

Muskrat and Mink

Mink and muskrat populations appear to be doing well in most of the state, although high water levels in southern areas are causing problems. DNR Biologist David Matheys indicates that, “muskrats have had problems with high water affecting denning and kit survival. Mink have been observed in some unusual places, being forced out of the flooded bottoms and valleys.” Matheys suspects they will “hang around these unusual places into the trapping season.”

On a statewide basis, opportunities to trap these species are quite good, as they exist in most areas where permanent water can be found. Season opener for muskrat is Oct. 23 in the North Zone, Oct. 30 in the South and Winnebago Zones, and the day after the duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first in the Mississippi River Zone. For mink the opener is identical, with earlier closing dates in each respective zone.

Season: Muskrat

North zone, Oct. 23 – Feb. 28, 2005
South zones Oct. 30 – Feb. 28, 2005
Winnebago zone Oct. 30 – March 15, 2005
Mississippi River – begins the day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first – Feb. 28, 2005

Season: Mink

North zone, Oct. 23 – Dec. 31
South zone, Oct. 30 – Dec. 31
Winnebago zone, Oct. 25 – March 15, 2005
Mississippi River – begins the day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first – Jan. 15, 2005

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Season Changes

The Mississippi River Zone will be into the fifth year of a successful change in opening dates. In an effort to allow open-water trapping, many wildlife managers, hunters, trappers and representatives from a variety of organizations developed a new season that begins the second Monday of November (Nov. 8 for 2004), or the day after the duck season ends, whichever occurs first. This earlier opener creates a perfect opportunity for experienced trappers to invite a friend or two along on the trapline and show them the beauty and hard work that's part of this overall, intense outdoor experience.

Additional Responsibilities

Local ordinances

Some villages, cities, and towns throughout the state, primarily in urban areas, require special permits and/or have ordinances that restrict trapping, or the discharge of firearms or bows. Check with local town or village offices before you hunt or trap to see if special rules apply! A quality hunting or trapping experience can be found on public or private lands. Pre-season scouting and permission from landowners is critical.

Best Management Practices

In a progressive effort to improve the science of furbearer management, the State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Trappers Association, Wisconsin Conservation Congress and individual trappers have been actively involved in an international effort to develop Best Management Practices for Trapping. This is the largest collective trap research effort ever undertaken anywhere in the world, with the final product being information and suggestions that each state and their trappers can use to improve on animal welfare, trapping in general, and trapper education specifically.

Advances in trapping through scientific study, like this effort, are the future of resource management in Wisconsin and in the United States.

"People who would like to learn more about furbearers, trapping history, responsibilities and ethics of the modern-day trapper should consider taking the trapper education course offered by the DNR," suggests John Irwin, president of the Wisconsin Trappers Association. "The course is taught by dedicated volunteer instructors of the Wisconsin Trappers Association. For people interested in becoming a trapper, completion of this 12-hour, \$8 course is mandatory."

To locate a trapper education class near you, contact a local DNR office or check the DNR Web page at <http://dnr.wi.gov> and search for "trapper education."

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: John Olson, furbearer specialist, (715) 762-3204, or Jolene Kuehn, assistant furbearer specialist, at (608) 261-6452.

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2004 upland wildlife fall hunting forecast

By Andrea Mezera, Assistant DNR Upland Wildlife Ecologist - (608) 261-8458

Ring-necked pheasant: wild populations stable; 19,000 pheasants to be released

Selected public hunting grounds around Wisconsin will be stocked with 19,000 pheasants raised at the Department of Natural Resources game farm to provide hunting opportunity. Hunters should check the pheasant hunting regulations and the general hunting regulations so they are aware of the counties in which a pheasant stamp is required and which public hunting grounds have a 2 p.m. closure and/or allow hen pheasant hunting.

Hen hunting properties were selected because they had no wild hens on or near them. It is illegal to shoot hen pheasants anywhere else in Wisconsin, except on licensed game farms. Such shooting would harm Wisconsin's wild pheasant population.

Preliminary pheasant crowing counts indicate stable wild pheasant populations statewide. Coupled with a series of mild winters, population estimates appear to be favorable. Although, cold temperatures and wet weather this spring and summer are expected to have a negative effect on productivity and brood survival.

Areas within the pheasant management counties that contain adequate winter cover (cattail and shrub-carr marshes and thick switch grass fields) and have more than 15 percent of the landscape in idle grassland will have the highest pheasant densities. In Wisconsin research has shown that wetlands are one of the most important year-round cover types for pheasants.

Over the long-term throughout the Midwest, pheasant populations have shown a decline, coinciding with changing agriculture and land use patterns. Pheasants once relied on small grain and hay fields for nesting and brood rearing. These areas are now being replaced with larger row crops of corn and soybeans. It will be important for hunters to identify areas with high quality habitat and concentrate hunting efforts in that area.

A pheasant stamp is required to hunt pheasants in pheasant management zones. Pheasant hunting opens statewide at noon Oct. 16 and closes on Dec. 31. From Oct. 16-17, the daily bag limit is one cock and possession limit is two. For the remainder of the season the daily bag limit is two cocks and the possession limit is four. Some public hunting grounds have both hen and cock pheasant hunting (requires free permits and tags) and /or 2 p.m. closure times. See the Special Pheasant pamphlet for details.

Wild turkey population continues to expand range northward

Preliminary permit levels for the fall wild turkey season are set at 84,600 permits. This is a 7 percent increase over the 2003 fall permit level of 78,750 permits. Early population estimates indicate another good year for turkey hunting. Poult, or turkey-young-of-the-year, counts will be completed in August and should provide biologists with additional information on brood survival.

The Wisconsin turkey population now extends well into the northern part of the state. Expansion is occurring in part due to statewide mild winters, available habitat, and expanded habitat development and improvement.

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A reminder, most turkey hunting occurs on private land so it is important that hunters keep landowner relationships a high priority. Landowners in Wisconsin are usually willing to allow hunters to use their land as long as hunters ask politely for permission to do so.

During the fall, turkeys spend more than 90 percent of the daylight hours in hardwood habitats. Both brood flocks and adult male flocks make extensive use of areas dominated by oak and hickory. Turkey hunters should monitor the acorn crop in the area they hunt, as the success or failure of acorns will determine where turkeys will be feeding. In years of poor acorn production, turkeys spend proportionately more time in cornfields.

The fall 2004 season will take place Oct. 9 through Nov. 7. Applications for the fall hunt were due Aug. 10. The bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per hunting approval notice.

Ruffed grouse population continues to be at low end of cycle

The 2004 ruffed grouse spring drumming survey shows a 14 percent decrease statewide in the number of drumming grouse heard during roadside surveys compared to last spring. The statewide average was 0.67 drums per stop in 2004 vs. 0.78 in 2003. The largest decrease was in the northern region of the state where drumming activity was down 17 percent compared to last year. The southeast region was the only part of the state that showed an increase (20 percent) in drumming activity. Wisconsin is currently on the downward side of the population cycle and biologists expect numbers to begin climbing in about a year or two. Depending upon the hatching success this spring, grouse numbers may begin to slowly increase this year.

Results are in line with the 10-year ruffed grouse cycle that peaked back in 1999. Reduced grouse in the bag can be expected, but these are great years to scout new hunting areas. Hunters will not find uniformly high numbers of grouse across the landscape. They will need to seek good habitat for ruffed grouse hunting this year and may have to move around to find the pockets where good numbers of birds can be found. Ruffed grouse use a variety of habitat types, but young, early successional forest types are most important when trying to find a good grouse hunting location.

The ruffed grouse season opens on Sept. 18 in the northern and western zone and on Oct. 16 in the eastern zone. The season closes on Dec. 8 in the eastern zone, Dec. 31 in the northern zone, and Jan. 31 in the western zone. The bag and possession limits are five and 10, respectively, in the northern and western zones and two and four in the eastern zone.

Sharp-tailed grouse permits decrease slightly

The Department of Natural Resources Prairie Grouse Committee recently set fall permit levels for the upcoming sharp-tailed grouse season. The four units open will have a total of 1,000 permits available. This is a decrease of 310 permits from the 2003 season. Sharp-tailed grouse units are the same as Deer Management Units. Those areas open for sharp-tailed grouse hunting include DMUs 2, 8, 9, and 10. This fall there will be 640 permits available in unit 2; 70 permits available in unit 8; 190 permits available in unit 9; and 100 permits available in unit 10. All hunters interested in hunting sharp-tailed grouse must have applied through the application process.

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Applications cost \$3 and were due Aug. 10. Hunters are encouraged to carefully review the zone map and apply for units that are open. Applying for closed units will result in an invalid application.

Sharp-tailed grouse habitat is open savanna and brush prairie, a habitat that is found only in limited areas of Wisconsin. Dancing ground surveys indicate that populations of sharp-tails were low this spring and will likely face poor productivity due to a combination of cool wet weather this spring and summer. Sharp-tailed hunting should be fair this fall. The fall 2004 season will take place Oct. 16 through Nov. 7.

Woodcock populations up this year in Wisconsin

American woodcock singing-ground data collected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2004 indicates a 15.2 percent increase from 2003 in the number of woodcocks heard displaying in Wisconsin. Because the woodcock is a migratory bird, both woodcock populations and hunting limits are Federally regulated. Woodcock are managed on the basis of two populations: Eastern and Central. Wisconsin lies in the Central Unit. Long-term trends from this survey indicate a decreasing population and decreasing hunter success in the Central Management Unit and in Wisconsin.

Singing-ground-survey data is based on the courtship behavior of the woodcock. Courtship displays by males begin shortly after their arrival in late March and April. When the females arrive shortly thereafter, they find males in forest openings or fields, performing a spiral courtship flight followed by a twittering descent. After he lands in the short grass opening, he begins a series of nasal "peents".

The preferred habitat of woodcock is woodlands and wet meadows. Moist, loamy soils are preferred because a major component of the woodcock diet is earthworms. Woodcock, like ruffed grouse, prefer early successional northern forests composed primarily of young aspen, alder, and spruce along with tangly brush.

The season dates for woodcock are Sept. 25 through Nov. 8.

Second mourning dove season will open Sept. 1

Wisconsin's second mourning dove season will run from Sept. 1 to Oct. 30. Since mourning doves are a migratory bird, the hunting limits are federally regulated. The bag limit is 15 with a possession limit of 30. Dove hunters are reminded that they must be HIP (Harvest Information Program) certified and must carry proof of such certification when hunting.

Long-term trends from the annual call count survey results indicate no change in the Wisconsin dove population over the past 34 years. Mourning doves are abundant throughout Wisconsin, and are most numerous south of a line from Green Bay to Eau Claire. Conservative population estimates place the number of mourning doves migrating from Wisconsin in the fall at 4 to 5 million. The population fluctuates annually with weather conditions and breeding success. The annual dove population survey results will be available from the federal government in July or early August.

The best dove hunting will be early in the season as birds normally assume an early migration from Wisconsin. Hunters should begin scouting potential hunting sites in late August. Areas that have an abundance of small seeds such as a recently harvested grain field are ideal for doves. If roosting cover, water, and a source of grit are nearby to a food source, your chances of finding doves will be very good. FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrea Mezera (608) 261-8458

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Hunting doves has unique safety concerns

MADISON – The opening of Wisconsin’s second mourning dove season (Sept. 1 – Oct. 30) is just around the corner. The smallish, fast-flying bird is especially common in the southern two-thirds of the state. In fact, biologists estimate that some 4 to 5 million mourning doves migrate through Wisconsin each fall.

“In many other states the mourning dove hunt signals the start of the fall hunting season,” said Tim Lawhern, hunter education administrator with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. “For many, it’s a social gathering and an opportunity to introduce new hunters to the sport.”

And while there’s often a light-hearted attitude toward this season, Lawhern says that’s absolutely no reason to adopt a similar approach when it comes to firearm and hunting safety.

“Because of the unique ways to hunt doves and because of the bird itself, there are some specific safety techniques that all mourning dove hunters should employ,” Lawhern said.

- Carefully check your shells before you enter the field. Use only those designed for dove hunting. Make sure your gun is plugged to hold no more than three shells.
- Do not load your gun until you’ve reached your hunting location on the field. Unload your gun before you leave.
- Know the location of other hunters – if any – on the field and make sure they are aware of your location.
- Identify your safe zone of fire and never shoot outside this zone. Your safe zone of fire is the area where you can safely shoot while taking into consideration the location of other hunters, roads and field boundaries.
- Do not shoot at low-flying birds. Always shoot skyward.
- Wear safety glasses or goggles and a cap with a bill to help protect your eyes from falling shot.
- When retrieving downed birds, visually mark the location before you leave your shooting location. Be sure other hunters in the area are aware that you are entering the field.
- Do not attempt to shoot at doves while retrieving a downed bird or when you are away from your shooting location.
- Do not hunt doves outside of the boundaries of the dove field.
- Never shoot a roosting or perching bird. Mourning doves often roost or perch on electrical, telephone, fiber optic or other energy or communication transmission lines. You could be criminally charged for damaging a line in this manner and held responsible for its repair, often costing tens of thousands of dollars.

Lawhern says in addition to these safety tips the basic rules of firearm safety – which are summarized by the initials TAB-K – also apply to dove hunting, or any other species.

In the TAB-K formula for firearm safety, “T” means treat every firearm as if it’s loaded. “A” means always keep your firearm pointed in a safe direction. “B” means to be certain of your target and what lies beyond and “K” means keep your finger out of the trigger guard until you are ready to fire.

According to Lawhern, the mourning dove season is a great opportunity to introduce a new or young hunter to the sport.

(more)

“With the dove season starting at a time of the year when warm weather is common, it’s a good chance to introduce a new hunter – young or old – to the sport. Not having to deal with the harsher fall and winter weather of other seasons can make for a much more enjoyable experience.”

Dove Baiting and Feeding

Mourning doves cannot be hunted with the aid of bait. Doves are migratory birds and are subject to the federal baiting regulations that prohibit hunting any migratory game bird with the aid of bait. Even nearby bait that may be legal for another species can attract doves and it would be illegal to hunt them in this situation.

A person can however hunt over manipulated agricultural crops. Federal law states: “nothing...prohibits...the taking of any migratory game birds, except waterfowl, coots and cranes, on or over lands or areas that are not otherwise baited areas, and where grain or other feed has been distributed or scattered solely as the result of manipulation of an agricultural crop or other feed on the land where grown, or solely as a result of normal agricultural operation.”

“Doves are one of the most exciting game birds to hunt. They’re extremely fast and a true test of any hunter’s skills,” Lawhern said. “And even though this is a relatively new game species for Wisconsin hunters, I have no doubt that all our hunters will continue to conduct themselves in a safe and sportsmanlike manner.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Lawhern- (608) 266-1317

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Firearm safety should be part of hunting plans

MADISON – As hunters begin preparations to stalk their favorite game during the upcoming fall hunting seasons, Wisconsin safety experts remind them to review firearm safety as part of those initial plans.

Last year, Wisconsin recorded a total of 35 hunting-related firearm injuries with two fatalities. Overall, hunting is getting safer due in large part to mandatory hunter education for those born on or after Jan.1, 1973. Many adults are also taking a hunter education class as safety certification is required to hunt game in some popular western states.

“We hope the day will come when we’ll report that there have been no firearm injuries during any hunting season in Wisconsin,” Lawhern said. “But that day will only come when every hunter makes it his or her personal responsibility to practice firearm safety 100 percent of the time.

“All hunters should do their part to create a new tradition in Wisconsin by making our hunting seasons free of firearm injuries,” Lawhern concluded.

Essential to any responsible hunting trip is an ironclad adherence to the four basic rules of firearm safety that can be easily recalled by remembering the TAB-K formula.

“Wardens investigate very few, if any, true accidents during any of our hunting seasons,” said Tim Lawhern, hunter education administrator with the Department of Natural Resources. “Most of the time, when someone is involved in a shooting incident, the shooter has failed to follow one of the most basic rules of firearm safety covered by TAB-K.”

(more)

What is TAB-K?

T - Treat every firearm as if it's loaded.

A - Always point your firearm in a safe direction.

B - Be certain of your target and what lies beyond.

K - Keep your finger out of the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.

"While a hunter may certainly not have intended to harm another person with his or her firearm, the fact remains that most hunting-related firearm injuries result from a violation of one or more of these simple rules," Lawhern said. "It's not an accident when someone disregards safety, it's negligent."

Planning your fall hunting trip also means having your gear in proper working order. Firearms should be cleaned and closely inspected for any signs of mechanical wear that could result in a problem in the field.

But firearms aren't the only items to be checked well in advance of a hunting trip. The clothing that you'll wear and other equipment should also be inspected for signs of wear and tear.

"Anything that might lead you to compromise safety should be repaired, discarded or replaced," said Lawhern. "A jacket that doesn't fit right or a scope that isn't adjusted correctly could distract you when you ought to be concentrating on safety."

Game Specific Safety

While the "TAB-K" safety rules can be applied to any hunting situation, there are other general precautions to take when hunting Wisconsin's various types of game this fall.

Turkey

- Don't stalk a turkey. Stalking a calling turkey usually means you're stalking another hunter.
- Be aware of other hunters. Overlapping seasons in the fall means you're likely to have company. If you're wearing camouflage, let others know of your whereabouts by shouting out to them.

Waterfowl

- If hunting from a boat or canoe, follow rules of safe boating. Wear lifejackets.
- Wear blaze orange to and from your boat or blind.
- If hunting with a dog, keep your dog's safety in mind, too.
- Unload your gun before setting it down. A few incidents happen when the dog steps on the trigger, firing the gun.

Small Game (pheasant, upland birds, squirrel, rabbit, fox, raccoon, etc.)

- When hunting birds, know your safe zone of fire at all times. Know where your partners are and where you can safely shoot.
- Be aware that others might be hunting in a nearby field. Look for signs of other hunters such as vehicles in the parking lot or flashes of blaze orange.
- Squirrel hunting is often best in the morning. Carry a flashlight to help walk through woods without stumbling.
- Only shoot at squirrels that have a safe backstop. If you can see daylight behind the squirrel, think of where your shot could go if you miss your target. If you're shooting a .22 rifle, that bullet could travel a mile or so.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Lawhern - (608) 266-1317

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Ethical hunters are ‘Eyes and Ears’ of DNR wardens for catching poachers

MADISON – Wisconsin’s conservation wardens take pride in knowing where to be and when to catch poachers and others who break state environmental and conservation laws. And while there are those who say, “They can’t be everywhere,” there are plenty of ethical hunters and outdoor enthusiasts who are ready to lend a hand – and a phone – when scofflaws are spotted.

Thanks to those well-meaning folks and a small but dedicated group of telephone hotline operators and investigators, there isn’t much in the way of environmental or conservation crime that escapes the scrutiny of a Wisconsin warden.

“The conscientious hunter, angler or outdoor enthusiast is our best ‘undercover’ agent,” said Marilyn Jahnke, a team leader in the special operations section of the bureau of law enforcement. “And we hope that ethical hunters and others will continue lending their eyes and ears to us when hunting seasons get underway this fall.”

The toll-free Turn in Poachers or TIP line number is 1-800-TIP-WDNR or 1-800-847-9367. Subscribers to U.S. Cellular service plans can access the hotline free of charge by dialing #367. All calls to the hotline are confidential and the caller can remain anonymous if he or she chooses so.

“About half of the calls that we’ve had the last few years are from people calling on cellular phones,” Jahnke said. “Those are some of our most useful calls because the person is often witnessing a violation in progress. They can provide very specific information to the operator and it makes for an easier case to close.”

Information can also be shared with the special investigation operators through E-mail at [<lawenf@dnr.state.wi.us>](mailto:lawenf@dnr.state.wi.us).

The DNR poacher tipline has been in operation since 1982 and its operators have answered more than 40,000 calls during that time. During the last year operators handled about 5,000 calls, forwarding just under half of them to conservation wardens for additional follow-up.

Jahnke recalls one recent incident involving a teenage boy who called to report two other teens that he suspected were violating fishing laws. As the ethical young angler was on the phone with an operator the two other boys approached him and an argument began. The operator could hear the shouting match in the background, with the caller telling the other boys that he was on the phone with the DNR and that wardens would be on their way. The two boys then stopped what they were doing and ran off.

Jahnke says that when reporting a violation, try to note as many facts as possible. You will be asked a variety of questions and the more information you can provide, the quicker the violator can be caught and the case successfully brought to completion.

“We’re extremely grateful for all the tips and leads that have been reported to our hotline during the last 20 years,” Jahnke added.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Chris McGeshick, Special Operations Chief (608) 266-8574 or Marilyn Jahnke, Special Operations Team Leader (608) 267-2774

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Department of Natural Resources – CE/6
PO Box 7921 Madison WI 53707-7921

Hunters, make your hunt safe and legal

Always ask permission to
hunt on private lands and
remember the formula for gun
hunting safety: "TAB-K"

- T - treat every firearm as if
it is loaded.
- A - always point the muzzle
of your firearm in a safe
direction.
- B - be certain of your target
and what lies beyond and
- K - keep your finger off the
trigger until you're ready to
shoot.

